

*into course file*

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Institut Simone de Beauvoir Institute

WMNS 398C/2

BLACK WOMEN: THE MISSING PAGES FROM CANADIAN WOMEN'S STUDIES

Instructor:  
ESMERALDA THORNHILL

FALL 1988

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SYLLABUS

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06-09-88

THORNHILL, Fall 1988

**BLACK WOMEN:**

**THE MISSING PAGES FROM CANADIAN WOMEN'S STUDIES**

**I COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This survey course is intended to sensitize students to the conspicuous absence of the Black Woman's experience and contributions from present Canadian Women's Studies.

The course will introduce participants to Black Women as a triply oppressed class, examining her historical, cultural and political treatment as well as the multiplicity and diversity of the roles Black Women have played throughout the drama of human history: as powerful militarists and heads of state during the rise of the great African dynasties of Egypt, Kush and Ethiopia; as the matrifocal axis of family, kin and the Black collectivity during the era of Black enslavement; as pioneering lobbyists, activists and advocates for Human Rights in the early history of North America; and as present day "poto mitan" or lifeline and mainstay of her nuclear and extended family (mother, worker, breadwinner, educator, caretaker, counsellor, advocate, etc.)

Prevalent negative stereotypes and pervading myths deriving directly from the distorted and dehumanizing experience of African enslavement will be analysed in order to reveal the underlying spirit and stamina for survival of the Black Woman, manifest through such awesome strengths as militancy, great self-respect, confidence, courage and independence. Students will be encouraged to reflect upon and to reassess certain "traditionally" accepted conceptual values with a view to laying the philosophical ground-work for the elaboration of a critical theory dealing with Canadian Women's Studies which would take into account the significant factors of race and sex and their interconnection.

In the light of a given conceptual frame-work, participants will have the opportunity to examine critically the Black Woman's experience within the Canadian context under such macro-themes as Immigration, Employment, Education, Human Rights, Culture and Relationships. Through a combined intellectual and experiential approach, grounded on both theory and practise, emphasis will be placed on the changing image of Black Women — from past myths and stereotypes to more realistic and truthful portraits, — and students will come to discover the significance of such age-old African traditions as orature (the oral tradition), and the important implications of its ensuing literary genres — slave narratives, biographical memoirs, poetry, letters and folk proverbs...

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The course itself reposes on several significant hypotheses; notably:

- 1) that Black Women are obfuscated from present Canadian Women's Studies;
- 2) that the Black Woman's experience of Triple Oppression and Survival is both enriching, instructive, and an indispensable cornerstone to Women's Studies;
- 3) and that proper recognition of the rightful place of Black Women in Canadian Women's Studies will help to improve and upgrade the links of Communication, Solidarity and Sisterhood among Canadian Women in Struggle.

## II COURSE OBJECTIVES

### General

To make Canadian Women's Studies more representative and reflective of ALL Canadian Women.

### Specific

- 1) To sensitize students to the past obfuscation and present conspicuous absence of Black Women from Canadian Women's Studies.
- 2) To unearth, identify and bring to light certain significant elements of the Black Woman's experience.
- 3) To bring added insight into the contributions of Black Women to The Canadian and Quebec experience.
- 4) To underscore the significance of Black Women's Studies and its relationship to both Women's studies and Black Studies.
- 5) To stimulate a critical reflexion which in turn will contribute to the evolution of existing theory dealing with Teaching and Research related to Women.

## III PEDAGOGICAL METHOD

This sensitization course aimed at the development and heightening of awareness will unfold under a combination of Lecture and Discussion Seminars where the Instructor's main role will be one of Facilitator, shifting continuously from that of principal Resource Person to that of Animator. In addition, approximately two(2) seminars with invited guest Resource Persons are planned.

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Class participation in discussions and exchanges among students is vital for stimulating GROWTH and educating for CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

#### IV GENERAL COURSE OUTLINE

This course falls into three(3) thematic BLOCKS:

- BLOCK I** COURSE INTRODUCTION  
Ideological, Historical, and Conceptual
- BLOCK II** HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF BLACK WOMEN  
From Antiquity to Now
- BLOCK III** BLACK WOMEN NOW!  
Issues and Implications in the Contemporary

#### V INSTRUMENTATION FOR COURSE

1. SYLLABUS, DETAILED COURSE OUTLINE, & COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY
2. ASSIGNED READINGS

##### A. Mandatory TEXTS

- a) HOOKS, Bell, Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism. Boston: South End Press,
- b) \_\_\_\_\_, Feminist Theory: From Margin To Centre. Boston. South End Press,
- c) JOSEPH, Gloria and Jill Lewis. Common Difference: Black and White Perspectives in Feminism.
- d) LORDE, Audre. Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches. N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1984.
- e) THORNHILL, Esmeralda. Black Women's Studies in Teaching Related to Women: Help or Hindrance To Universal Sisterhood? In Fireweed, Spring 1983.
- f) \_\_\_\_\_, Focus On Black Women. In Canadian Journal of Women and The Law, vol. I, no I, 1985.



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B. COMPLEMENTARY READING SELECTIONS

These readings will be assigned from the COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY READING LIST as the course progresses.

3. FILMS

1. Voice of the Fugitive (National Film Board)
2. Cimarrones (C. Ferrand)
3. A Tale of "O" (Goodmeasure Inc.)
4. From Racism to Pluralism (Council on Interracial Books for Children)
5. Hairpiece (PBS)

VI EVALUATION

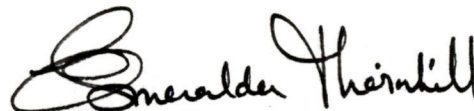
Students' evaluation for this course will be based primarily on 2 major assignments. Assignment received by me up to one week after the stipulated deadlines will be penalized 10%. Assignments will NOT BE accepted after this one week delay. No "make-up" assignments will be provided.

The unique "ground-breaking" nature of this seminar course makes attendance compulsory. And since class attendance and participation play so indispensable a role in this course they will represent 15% of the final evaluation mark.

Two(2) individual assignments each one worth 40% and 45% respectively of the final mark will complete the evaluation of students enrolled in this course.

**Note: An independent Concordia University Evaluation of the course itself will also be requested and carried out towards the end of term.**

Class Attendance and Participation	15%
1st Assignment	40%
2nd Assignment	45%
TOTAL	100%



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DETAILED COURSE OUTLINE

BLOCK 1 COURSE INTRODUCTION: Ideological  
Historical and Conceptual

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September 7th

IDEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION  
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1. Nature of participants' motivation, interest in  
and expectations in taking the course
2. Significance and Implications of the course  
Black Women: Missing Pages...
  - Philosophical interfacing and underlying hypotheses
  - Present state of Canadian Women's Studies
3. Genesis of Course
  - UN Decade for Women
  - First International Conference on Teaching and Research  
Related to Women... Montreal, July 1982.

4. REFERENCES:

Course Syllabus  
Thornhill, Black Women's Studies in Teaching Related  
to Women: Help or Hindrance to Universal  
Sisterhood?

5. ASSIGNMENT

Bell Hooks, Ain't I A Woman?

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ASSIGNMENT #1

1. Unearth an obfuscated historical personage, image and/or event.
2. Describe it in its proper perspective.
3. Explain its importance (Then and Now).
4. Examine and analyze its obfuscation.
5. Justify its being salvaged and brought to light.
6. Comment on its significance for current Canadian Women's Studies.

Note

Deadline: October 19th, 1988  
Length: 8-10 typewritten pages double spaced  
(All assignments must be typewritten)  
Be sure to provide accurate bibliographical sources.

September 14th

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION  
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1. Historical Backdrop of Blacks in Canadian context.
2. Film: Voice of the Fugitive  
(National Film Board 28 min. 55 sec.)
3. Themes: Black Presence in Ancient America,  
Black enslavement, Underground Railroad,  
obfuscated pioneers (Marie-Joseph Angélique,  
Mary-Ann Shadd, Harriet Tubman...)

4. REFERENCES:

- Bertley, Canada and Its People of African Descent.
- Ferrand, Cimarrones (film)
- Hill, The Freedom Seekers.
- Thornhill, Focus on Black Women
- \_\_\_\_\_, Le revers de la médaille.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Race and Class in Canada: The Case of Blacks in Quebec.
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Black Presence in Quebec
- Walker, History of Blacks in Canada.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Précis de l'Histoire des Noirs au Canada
- Van Sertima, The African Presence in Ancient America: They Came Before Columbus.
- Winks, The Blacks in Canada.

5. ASSIGNMENT

- Lorde, Sister Outsider



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## ASSIGNMENT #2

1. Historians have argued that no other group~~s~~ in the Americas has had its identity so socialized out of existence as have Black Women.

Drawing on Course readings and giving your own reactions, comment on the accuracy or inaccuracy of such a statement.

2. Bell Hooks posits that "it is essential for continued feminist struggle that Black Women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us...We have a central role to play in the making of feminist theory and a contribution to offer that is unique and valuable."

Clarify the theory undergirding this affirmation, critique Hook's position from your own vantage point and explain the inherent implications for future feminist struggle.

3. "So often we hear women's publications, presses and organizations excuse all-white publications and groups with the cry that they cannot "find" women of colour. We were never lost. We are not invisible. On the contrary, we are alive and living in Canada. →

In the light of your readings and Course exposure (films, discussions...), review this assertion and its relevancy to the reality of Black Women in Canada.

N.B.

1. Structure your essay in well-thought-out clearly developed paragraphs.
2. Use readings (mandatory, optional and supplementary) to prove your contentions.
3. Draw also on viewpoints, audio-visual materials and the gist of discussions/exchanges to which you were exposed in class.
4. Avoid making sweeping generalizations that you have not proven factually or theoretically.

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5. Make sure you set forth your own view point or reactions.
6. Attempt to think of Black Women both individually and collectively.
7. Be sure to provide accurate bibliographical references.

DEADLINE: November 30, 1988  
Length: 8 - 10 typewritten  
pages, double-spaced  
All Assignments must be  
typewritten

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